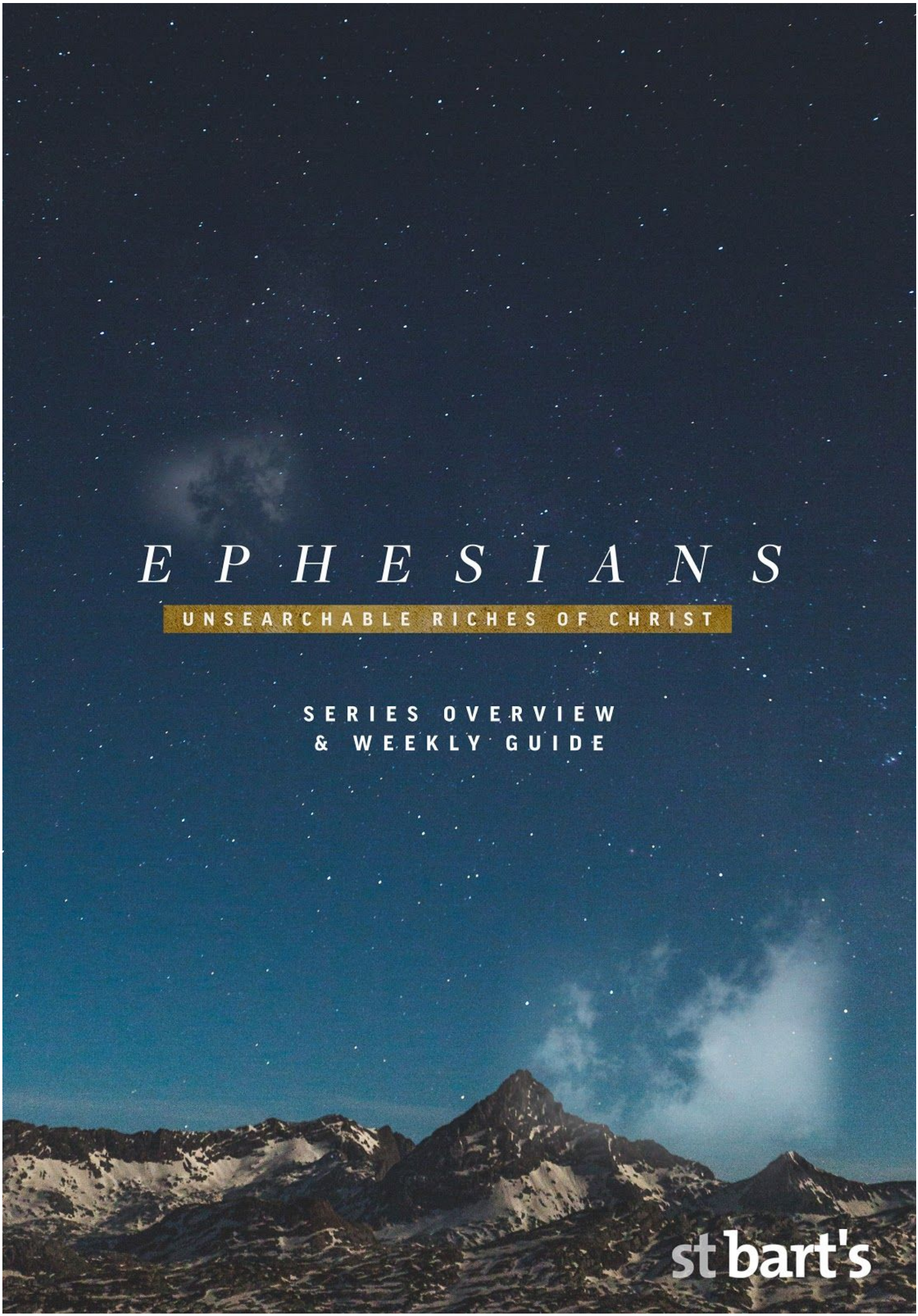

EPHESIANS
UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST
SERIES OVERVIEW
& WEEKLY GUIDE
st bart's

Overview & Introduction

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul explores the unsearchable riches of God's grace that have been poured out through God's saving work culminating in Christ. Paul demonstrates how the Gospel creates a radical unity in anticipation of the whole of creation being brought under the Lordship of Jesus. In the power of the Spirit, this Good News transforms every aspect of our communities and our lives - shaping how we behave, think, love, relate, work, and stand firm in the face of evil.

Context

- **Author & Date:** Whilst some have doubted Pauline authorship, the general consensus of scholars (as per the introduction to the letter) is that the letter is an authentic letter of Paul written towards the end of an extended period of imprisonment (likely after almost all of his other letters, circa AD 62).
- **Ephesus:** Ephesus was a city located in Asia Minor (modern day western Turkey), known for its idolatry of various gods and goddesses, along with imperial worship of the emperor (and his family) as a deity.
- **Context:** Whilst many of Paul's letter are written to address *specific issues* (e.g., theological problems in Galatia, divisive issues in Corinth), Ephesians has no obvious presenting problem. It's likely that the letter was intended to be used as a 'circular', to be shared amongst various Christian communities of the early church as an encouragement regarding the centrality of Christ.
- **Backstory:** Paul's story with the Ephesians begins in Acts 19 with his visit to Ephesus which lasted for two to three years (likely AD 52-54). Paul began preaching in the Jewish synagogue, but due to the 'obstinate' reception he received, Paul shifted his teaching to a private lecture hall. Paul's ministry was accompanied by extraordinary miracles, with many coming to profess Jesus as Lord. Paul's departure from Ephesus was hastened by a "great disturbance" in the city, led by craftsmen whose business of selling religious paraphernalia in honour of Artemis was undermined by the sheer number of people converting to Christianity. Paul wrote the letter sometime later (AD 62) from prison.

Key Themes

Part 1: God's Story of the Gospel (Chapters 1-3)

- The story of the Gospel and how it relates to the world across time (creation, fall, redemption, new creation)
- The absolute centrality of Christ
- The radical unity that all Christians share under because we are united *by* and *for* the one Lord
- The church's role in the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel

Part 2: Our Story in the Gospel (Chapters 4-6)

- The Christian life as transformation ('taking off of the old' and 'putting on of the new')
- The unity of the church in Christ and the diversity of the gifts we express
- The extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit as the same power that raised Jesus from the dead
- How following Jesus affects all of our relationships (e.g., community, marriage, work, family)
- The spiritual battle that Christians face and the means by which we can stand firm

Outline

1. Week 1: OCTOBER 11	Ephesians 1:1-14	The Divine Plan
2. Week 2: OCTOBER 18	Ephesians 1:15-23	What You Have in Christ
3. Week 3: OCTOBER 25	Ephesians 2:1-10	This is Your Life
4. Week 4: NOVEMBER 1	Ephesians 2:11-22	Together in Christ
5. Week 5: NOVEMBER 8	Ephesians 3:1-13	The Secret is Out
6. Week 6: NOVEMBER 15	Ephesians 3:14-21	Paul's Prayer
7. Week 7: NOVEMBER 22	Ephesians 4:1-16	What Matters Now
8. Week 8: NOVEMBER 29	Ephesians 4:17-32	Two Ways to Walk
9. Week 9: DECEMBER 13	Ephesians 5:1-20	Proper vs Improper
10. Week 10: DECEMBER 20	Ephesians 5:21-6:9	Why Relationships Matter
11. Week 11: DECEMBER 27	Ephesians 6:10-24	Be Strong

Note: December 6 will be a brief break from the series for our 'Baptism Sunday'.

Helpful Resources

- Website: "The Bible Project". Helpful video overview and resources: bibleproject.com/explore/ephesians/
- Book: "Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters" by Tom Wright
- Book: "The Story of God Bible Commentary: Ephesians" by Mark D. Roberts
- Book (Advanced): "Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians" by Frank Thielman
- Course: "Ephesians" by the Gospel Coalition: www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/ephesians/
- Course (paid): "Paul and his Letter to the Ephesians" by Tom Wright: https://bit.ly/34tyFh3

Adam Lowe
St Bart's, Toowoomba
October 2020

Weekly Guide

WEEK 1: The Divine Plan (Ephesians 1:1-14)

Key Verses: *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment —to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.* (Ephesians 1:7-10)

Big Idea: When - in God's extraordinary grace - we respond to the Gospel of Jesus, we become caught up in the entire history and scope of God's work of creation, redemption, and new creation. God gifts us with his Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing our future inheritance, along with equipping us to serve him as one unified body today.

Questions to Consider

- In what way does Paul say that followers of Jesus have been "blessed"? Why can we describe grace as richness?
- What is meant by being chosen before the creation of the world? Can you explain what is meant by being "predestined for adoption"? For what purpose were we chosen?
- Where do you spend most of your time each week? What does it look like on that frontline to be 'holy and blameless' with your actions, words, and thoughts?
- How are we as a church brought into unity as one body under Jesus, our Messiah?
- In these opening verses, how does Paul make it evident that when we are in Christ, that we've been caught up in the entire history and scope of God's work of creation, redemption, and new creation?
- According to Paul, how can we know that we have been included in Christ? What are the markers?
- In what way is the Spirit a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance?

WEEK 2: What You Have in Christ (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Key Verses: *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.* (Ephesians 1:18-20)

Big Idea: Two of the key ways that Paul serves the church at Ephesus, is by: (a) giving thanks to God for them; and (b) remembering them in his prayer. At the heart of Paul's prayer, is that the church in Ephesus would 'wake up' to know God more and see that the extraordinary power of the Spirit - the same power that raised Jesus from the dead - has been entrusted to them.

Questions to Consider

- How does Paul pray for the Ephesians? What does Paul long for them?
- How do you typically pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ? How could Paul's prayer shape the way in which you regularly pray for the church?
- How can we "know" the extraordinary power that the Lord has given to us through his Spirit?
- In what way is this power not for ourselves, but for the purposes of God? What does this look like day-to-day?
- What has God placed under the feet of Jesus? What should it mean for us, as individuals and as the church, that Jesus has been appointed over everything and everyone?
- Is there anything in your life that you would prefer to be "off limits" to Jesus? Is it? Should it be?

WEEK 3: This is Your Life (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Key Verses: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith —and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Big Idea: Following Jesus and delighting in his good news does not make us merely members of a club, but is the difference between being dead and alive! When we come alive in Christ, we're set apart to do the work that he has prepared for us to do - not in order to be saved, but as an expression that we are saved.

Questions to Consider

- How is the Christian life like coming alive from the dead? Has there been a particular time in your life when you have known this to be true?
- Is there any point in your life in which you have known the rich mercy of God more intently?
- What do you think is meant by the "incomparable riches of his grace"? Why is God's grace incomparable to absolutely anything else? Why is it important for us to remember that?
- When you follow Jesus, how does your life get 'caught up' in his resurrection?
- How are our works/efforts, as an expression of being saved rather than the means to be saved?
- What do you think are the 'works' that God has prepared for you to do on your frontlines?

WEEK 4: Together in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22)

Key Verses: *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* (Ephesians 2:19-20)

Big Idea: Whilst we were once *not part of God's covenant family*, through Christ's reconciling death on the cross we now can be part of God's family. It is through Jesus - our cornerstone - that we have access to the Father and the Spirit, no longer foreigners, but citizens of God's forever kingdom.

Questions to Consider

- How has Jesus' reconciling work on the cross united us into God's family?
- What does it mean to you to be 'fellow citizens' and a member of God's household?
- To what extent is the Gospel open to all? Can you think of anyone on your frontlines for whom you long to be part of God's household?
- In what way are we a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit? If God dwells in us by his Spirit, what should that mean for us as we face challenges, seek to serve the Lord, and make choices on how to live?
- Is it ultimately possible to have a unified community without Jesus? How is the church unified *by* Jesus and *for* Jesus?
- If our community is ultimately unified, *by and for Jesus,* how much of an effort and priority should we make it to express our unity? How do we therefore work through challenges together whilst also expressing unity?

WEEK 5: The Secret is Out (Ephesians 3:1-13)

Key Verses: *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.* (Ephesians 3:10-12)

Big Idea: Paul's conversion (see Acts 9) was not something in which he boasted, but something for which he gave great thanks to God as part of God's broader saving work to include the Gentiles. Paul not only marvels at God's saving plan for *the entire world,* but also the privilege he has in sharing this Good News to all. It's because of Jesus' saving work on the cross that everyone can approach God with freedom and confidence.

Questions to Consider

- What was the grace that Paul talks about as given to him?
- How was Paul's conversion *more broadly* part of God's mission to the entire world? Why was Paul so excited by that?
- If you follow Jesus, how do you recognise that God's grace was at work in your conversion?
- What does Paul mean by him becoming a servant of the Gospel? What do you think it looks like on your frontline to be a servant of the Gospel, too?
- What does the "manifold wisdom of God" mean? To what extent does Paul want this manifold wisdom to be made known?
- On what basis can we approach God with freedom and confidence? How do you come before God each day?
- What basis would cause you to approach God with even more freedom and confidence?
- How are Paul's sufferings for them, for *their glory*?

WEEK 6: Paul's Prayer (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Key Verses: *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.* (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Big Idea: As Paul prays *big* prayers for the Ephesians, his great longing is that they may continue to be grounded and growing in their knowledge of the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul longs that the Ephesians' identity will be rooted in the love of God above everything else. Paul also trusts that God is actively at work through the church, for the glory of God throughout all generations and all of eternity.

Questions to Consider

- What are the various ways in which Paul has prayed for the Ephesians so far in the letter?
- What do you think is some of the practical fruit of a community that is grounded and growing in God's love?
- How would you describe the *width, length, height, and depth* of God's love to someone who is not yet a follower of Jesus? How should the extent of such a love be poured out through our lives in the world and to those around us?
- Try praying for your brothers and sisters that they too *out of God's glorious riches may be strengthened with power through God's Spirit, that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.*
- What is meant by Paul when he says that God can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine? For whose glory and kingdom is it? How should that shape the content and focus of our prayer lives?
- Do you know anyone who has greatly glorified through their life? What do you think it looks like to glorify God on your frontlines?

WEEK 7: What Matters Now (Ephesians 4:1-16)

Key Verses: *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* (Ephesians 4:4-7)

Big Idea: Even in prison, Paul saw every part of his life as an opportunity to serve Jesus and live a transformed life. We live in this way *not in order to be found worthy* but because we have been made worthy through Jesus. One of the key ways in which the Christian is to express their identity in Christ, is to maintain unity as the body through gentleness, patience, and forbearance in love. We are one in Christ, but diverse in gifts. Such pursuit of unity is a marker of maturity, freeing us from powers that would otherwise tear us apart, and freeing us for the work that God has entrusted us with.

Questions to Consider

- What does it mean that we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all?
- How much of a priority do you view unity? How much of a priority do you view it to build up Christ's church?
- What do you think it means to be gentle, patient, and forbearing in love? Can you think of some circumstances in which that is more challenging to demonstrate? What helps you to act this way?
- What are some practical ways in which you express unity in the life of our church? How do you think you could be an even more unifying presence?
- How is our unity clearly defined in Jesus? What are the diverse gifts that you see expressed in the life of our church?
- What are the ways (e.g., skills, time, passion, resources, experience) in which God has gifted you for the building up of his church? If you're not sure, try asking a trusted Christian friend what God-given gifts they recognise in you.

WEEK 8: Two Ways to Walk (Ephesians 4:17-32)

Key Verses: *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.* (Ephesians 4:17-18)

Big Idea: In response to who we are in Christ, we are called to live not according to the standards of the world but according to the standards of God. This *new way of life* involves a 'taking off' of the old life, and 'putting on' of the new *in order that we would reflect the holiness of God*. Practically this means putting away such things as lies, anger, theft, and grudges, and instead speaking truthfully, living peaceably, giving generously, and readily forgiving. Following Jesus involves not only the absence of sin but the expression of love.

Questions to Consider

- What do you think it looks like to 'take off our old humanity' and 'put on the new'? Can you think of one particular area in which you need to do this more proactively?
- What are some of the 'ways of the world' that we ought to insist (in ourselves) in not adopting in our lives?
- How can falling into sin actually be a foothold for the enemy?
- How is following Jesus not merely about trying not to sin, but actually a whole new way of being?
- On your frontline this week, what would be one particular expression of speaking truthfully, living peaceable, giving generously, or readily forgiving?
- What is meant by 'unwholesome talk'? If we are ever in a context in which there is regular 'unwholesome talk', how could you best respond?

WEEK 9: Proper vs Improper (Ephesians 5:1-20)

Key Verses: *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.* (Ephesians 5:1-3)

Big Idea: Once again, the Ephesians are implored to not live in the ways of darkness (e.g., sexual immorality, greed, obscenity) but to instead be 'children of the light'. Not only is the follower of Jesus to refrain from these things, but we ought also not to be embroiled in other people's disobedience either. Living in the light involves shining the righteousness of God and expressing that outwardly through the building up of others (e.g., through encouragement in words, God's word, and song) and training our hearts to be ever-thankful to God.

Questions to Consider

- What does it look like to follow God's example to walk in the way of love?
- Why should some things be 'off limits' to the children of God? Can you think of some examples? How are these things actually fruitless long term?
- How should the light of Christ wake us up to parts of our lives that should now be former?
- How is walking 'in the way of love' a sacrifice that is pleasing to God?
- Can you identify anything in your life - or even a 'hint' of something - that you need to abandon in favour of walking in the light of God?
- What are they key ways in which we can build others up through our words? Who this coming week could you encourage through your words, the Word, or the Word in praise?

WEEK 10: Why Relationships Matter (Ephesians 5:21-6:9)

Key Verses: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* (Ephesians 5:21-24)

Big Idea: Submission in the Christian life is not seen as weakness but a fitting imitation of our Lord. The way in which we should submit in our relationships (e.g., within marriage, with parents, or the workplace) is by no means an endorsement that 'anything goes', but a sincere expression of how the Lord demonstrated his love for us. The way we should submit to one another should be a constant demonstration of God's love for the world.

Questions to Consider

- What is the basis of any submission in which we are to partake?
- Is the idea of submission a popular concept in our culture? How is Jesus the ultimate example of submission?
- How is submission different from being taken advantage of or abused? How can submission, especially *mutual submission*, actually be a counter-cultural demonstration of God's love?
- If the wife is to love the husband *as the church submits to Christ*, and the husband is to love the wife *as Christ loves the church*, what sort of standard of love is being commanded?
- On your frontlines this week, what does it look like to submit in love? If you have a boss, what does it look like to demonstrate the love of God to them? If you are the boss, what does it look like to show the love of God to those who work for you?
- Are there any other relationships in which you have the potential to demonstrate God's radical love more richly?

WEEK 11: Be Strong (Ephesians 6:10-24)

Key Verses: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Big Idea: As the follower of Jesus is enjoined with a new family, set apart for a new purpose, and is to put aside their old ways for the new, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are also engaged in spiritual battle between two kingdoms. The Christian life not only involves a 'taking off' of old ways and 'putting on' of the new, but also a 'putting on' of the armour of God. Whilst the battle is real, we should not be overwhelmed, for God has not only defeated the enemy (who awaits destruction) but equipped the faithful with an armour in which to be clothed.

Questions to Consider

- What is the basis for our strength?
- What does it look like to put on the 'armour of God' and for what purpose?
- Considering all of the various pieces of the armour, can you name the role of each piece?
- What is the danger in trying to 'stand firm' in our strength or by our own power?
- Whilst the battle is real, should Christians be intimidated by the enemy? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to 'pray in the Spirit' with all kinds of prayers and requests? What concern should we always be alert to when we are praying? How does that focus reinforce the emphasis on unity in this letter?
- What prayer does Paul request for himself? Who could you be praying that prayer for this week?
- Who is Paul sending to the Ephesians and for what purpose?